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ABSTRACT

The Student Problem Areas Survey was administered to 237 black and white students attending a predominantly white university and 55 black students attending a predominantly black university. The instrument was developed at the University Counseling Center for the purpose of determining broad problem areas within which relevant mental health programs might be developed. It contains 20 problem areas with examples of specific problems which respondents are asked to rate according to how freguently they need assistance with them. The 20 problem areas were developed from a list of 55 problems that 20 black resident assistants in a peer counselor training program listed. Data from a two way randomized block design were analyzed by way of a multivariate analysis of variance and a series of analyses of variance. The pattern of results showed several significant differences on specific problem areas, but none between blacks attending universities with different racial make-ups, nor between the groups on variables that typically suggest counseling needs. The counseling needs of black students were found to be similar regardless of the racial composition of the university population. Given the similarities between black and white students' self report on the problem areas, it appears that, in the absence of data clearly indicating otherwise, all counselors should initially assume that some variation of the counseling methods typically used with white students would be useful with black students.
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COUNSELING CENTER
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PERCEIVED PROBLEM AREAS BY BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS AND HINTS ABOUT COMPARATIVE COUNSELING NEEDS

Franklin D. Westbrook, Javier Miyares,
and Joyce H. Roberts

Research Report # 11-77

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Summary

The Student Problem Areas Survey was administered to 237 black and white students attending a predominantly white university and 55 black students attending a predominantly black university. Data from a two-way randomized block design were analyzed by way of the Multivariate Analysis of Variance and a series of Analyses of Variance. The pattern of results showed several significant differences on specific problem areas, but none between blacks attending universities with different racial make-ups, nor between the groups on variables that typically suggest counseling needs. There was one group X class interaction and the ranking of the problem areas was the same for the three groups. The results were discussed as to their implications for counseling needs of black students in university settings.

The numbers of black students on major university campuses have increased markedly over the last ten years (Sedlacek & Pelham, 1976; Astin, King, Light & Richardson, 1975) and their academic, social, and personal lives have been fraught with many problems (Altman & Snyder, 1970; Green, 1969; Williams, 1969). Through her clinical observations, Gibbs (1973) characterized the problem areas of black students on a major, primarily white campus as (1) establishing a meaningful personal identity, (2) academic performance, (3) interpersonal relations, (4) autonomy, (5) sexual and aggressive feelings, (6) long range career plans, and (7) multiple problems. If black students on previously all white campuses suffer from these problems to the extent of Gibbs' report, one wonders what the causes might be. Is the university environment the precipitant of the problems or is the sample an unusual one? In any event the students in the sample appear to be in need of counseling resources.

Participants at a conference on counseling sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board declared that traditional counseling models are inappropriate for students in the black college environments. They stressed the need for counseling that would facilitate academic success, as opposed to crisis-oriented counseling (Brown, 1972). Hence, one would infer that the counseling needs of black students on a previously all white campus are different from the needs of black students on a previously all black campus and that either the environments interact with counseling needs or that the students who elect to go to the different type institutions are different.

While Gibbs' clinical observations have been corroborated by other clinical observers (Vontress, 1968; Williams, 1969), no known empirical studies have been done comparing either the counseling needs of black and white students in

the same environment or the counseling needs of black students in the two different environments.

Potkay and Fullerton (1973) surveyed a primarily white student population asking them to indicate the three most severe problems they experienced. Analyses of their data showed an array of 15 problem areas that, in a general fashion, provide rubrics under which the majority of Gibbs' subjects' problems could be listed. Furthermore, college personnel specialists and mental health practitioners have historically been interested in assessing problems experienced by college students. The Mooney Problems Check List, for example, is a result of these interests. A perusal of the instrument will show many of the problems observed by Gibbs. Hence, it might be assumed that many of the problems are not unique to black students. Cheatham's (1973) report of a 79 percent overlap between the counseling services available on black and white campuses also suggests that a high degree of similarity exists between problems students experience, regardless of race or college setting. Westbrook & Smith (1976) developed a set of 20 problem areas by asking black resident hall staff to list problems they were asked by black students to solve. The individual problems were grouped into the 20 problem areas which encompass the majority of the problem areas mentioned by both Gibbs and Potkay & Fullerton.

The fact that blacks and whites report having similar problems and that similar counseling services exist on both black and white campuses suggests that counseling needs are similar. However, since the problems studied have involved students only at primarily white universities, a number of questions remain unanswered. For example, are the counseling needs of black students different when the students attend a primarily black university? Do similarities between counseling needs develop when blacks and whites are placed in the

same environment? The present study was designed to provide preliminary answers to these questions.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for the study were 108 black students (39 lower division and 14 upper division from an eastern, primarily white, state university and 33 lower division and 22 upper division from an eastern, primarily black, private university) and 184 white students (102 lower division and 82 upper division) from the aforementioned white university. All of the subjects were enrolled in mid-level social science courses at their respective universities and were administered the Student Problem Areas Survey (SPAS) within the same week during the Spring semester of 1976.

Instrument

The SPAS was developed at the University Counseling Center for the purpose of determining broad problem areas within which relevant mental health programs may be developed (Westbrook & Smith, 1976). The instrument contains 20 problem areas with examples of specific problems which respondents are asked to rate according to how frequently they need assistance with them. A Likert type scale is used for the ratings, with a range of 1 (never) to 5 (very often), e.g., financial assistance (getting a job, loan, scholarship, grant) See Table 2 for a listing of the items.

The 20 problem areas were developed from a list of 55 problems that 20 black resident assistants in a peer counselor training program listed when they were asked to "list every problem for which black students have approached you for a solution."

The instrument has been given twice to two groups, with a two week interval, to compute test-retest reliability estimates. Both instances

produced similar results: The Pearson correlations had a range from the .30's to the .70's, with an average correlation around .55. In both analyses, one problem area had a low test-retest correlation (Drug abuse: both r's = .20) and was dropped from the analyses done for this study, thus leaving 19 problem areas. A Spearman Rho correlation between the item means of the two administrations of one reliability sample yielded a coefficient of .90. These findings suggest that, while the instrument might not be sufficiently reliable for its use with individual students, it is reliable enough for group comparisons.

Statistical Analyses

A Multivariate two-way analysis of variance (group X class) was computed with the 19 problem areas as dependent variables. The Manova was followed by a set of 19 univariate two-way analyses of variance. Some of the subjects were randomly dropped so as to achieve proportional cell sizes (see Table 1 for final cell sizes). In addition, a Kruskall-Wallis one-way analysis of variance was computed between the rankings of the means of the three groups.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Results

The Manova yielded significant Wilks' lambdas for both main effects (class p .01; group p .001), but not for the interaction (p .234); these results show that overall the 19 problem areas differentiated significantly our samples. Table 2 shows the univariate F's obtained. Of the 19 problem areas, six yielded significant differences by group, seven by class, and one yielded a significant group X class interaction. According to Sakoda, Cohen and Beall

(1954), there is a .05 chance probability of obtaining at least three significant statistics out of 19 calculated statistics. Hence, we can infer that the differences observed between levels of both factors cannot be explained by chance. Obviously, this is not the case with the interactions. Indeed, the univariate results support, and can help interpret, the Manova's results.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Student-Newman-Keuls post-hoc tests were computed between levels of the groups factor for the six significant problem areas. None of the significant posthoc differences found were between the two black groups, but rather between the black groups and the white group (study efficiency, ethnic unity, ethnic trust and financial assistance between the blacks at the black university and the white group; study efficiency, financial assistance, and inter-racial conflict between the blacks at the white university and the white group; intra-racial conflict did not produce any significant post hoc results). In the six areas, the white group's means were lower than both black groups (less severe problems); overall this was true in 14 out of the 19 problem areas. Regarding the class factor, in the six significant areas, underclasspersons had higher means (more severe problems) than upperclasspersons; overall, this was also true in 16 of the 19 areas. (See Table 3.)

Insert Table 3 About Here

The Kruskall-Wallis analysis of variance between the rankings of the means of the white group and the two black groups on the 19 problem areas was not significant (H = 1.82).

The general pattern is, then, that underclasspersons have more problems than upperclasspersons; blacks have more problems than whites; no differences exist between blacks attending universities with a different racial makeup; and the ranking of the problem areas is the same for the three groups.

Discussion

The fact that the ranked means for the 19 problem areas for the three groups are essentially the same suggests that the SPAS includes problems that are understandable and relevant to both black and white students. The significant differences between them were on problem areas that are specific to academic achievement, economics, and racial composition and interactions. The university was not found to be a significant variable. The results on study efficiency and financial assistance are especially relevant on this point.

Regardless of the university black subjects reported experiencing more problems in the areas of study efficiency and financial assistance than did white subjects. Although it was not surprising to find differences between blacks and whites, it was expected that they would be found between the subjects at the white university. While the white university draws most of its black students from the state and metropolitan area where it is located and would be expected to attract students with a wide range of academic and economic resources, the black university is private and more regional in character. It was expected that black students who attend it would generally have better academic skills and resources and would need less financial assistance than black students who attended the white university. These findings might be interpreted to reflect the pervasiveness of limited educational and economic opportunities for blacks. It must, however, be noted that the SPAS assessed students' perceptions rather than reality.

Blacks reported more problems in the areas of ethnic unity and ethnic trust, regardless of the university, than did whites; and blacks reported more problems than did whites in the areas of inter-racial and intra-racial conflict whereas blacks at the black university produced a higher mean on intra-racial conflict ($\bar{X} = 1.58$) than on inter-racial conflict ($\bar{X} = 1.40$). However, blacks at the white university showed the opposite (1.71 and 1.60, respectively), and they showed consistently lower means on ethnic unity and ethnic trust. On the other hand, white subjects reported experiencing slightly greater friction between races than within their racial group and more problems with ethnic trust than with ethnic unity.

Ethnic unity and ethnic trust are within-group variables which assess issues related to restrictions placed on persons' abilities to establish working and interpersonal relationships and issues related to loyalty and devotion, respectively. One might also think of these as class variables. The consistency of the data lends credibility to them and to the class interpretation. Since black students at the black university reported more problems with intra-racial than inter-racial problem areas than did black students at the white university, it would be expected that the former group would report more problems than the latter in the areas of ethnic unity and ethnic trust. This is exactly as it happened. The social requirements of college life produce stresses regardless of the race of the student. Black students in the black environment attribute the stresses to blacks versus blacks; the blacks in the white environment attribute the stresses to whites versus blacks; and whites in the white environment attribute the stresses to whites versus whites. While racial and ethnic problem areas were perceived by white subjects as being among their lowest concerns, their means on the ethnic variables were substantially higher than their means on the racial variables.

Conclusions

The counseling needs of black students are similar regardless of the racial make-up of the University. The present study suggests that a "traditional model" is responsive to the assessed needs, i.e., widely varying problem areas, of both black and white students, when "traditional model" is defined as a counseling service which provides both educational-vocational and also short term personal counseling (Gelso, Birk, Utz, & Silver, 1977). Although the traditional model has been assessed as unsatisfactory for contemporary student needs (Oetting, Ivey, & Weigel, 1970; Warnath, 1973), it was rated most appropriate among four possible models by a rather large student sample (N = 187) and also by four of five additional campus subgroups; Cheatham (1975) found a 79% overlap between counseling services on black college campuses and American colleges in general; and Johnson (1977) showed that black students' attitudes toward helping resources are similar to those of white students.

The attribution of the racial/class problem areas by black students was affected by the dominant racial make-up of the university. There are no data in the present study from which to draw inferences about counseling methods nor the race and class identity of the counselor that are acceptable to black students. Lorion's (1974) review of literature related to the effects of social class and race on counseling outcomes demonstrates that the issue is unresoved. He showed, however, that counselors' attitudes, which can have negative effects on the counseling outcomes, concerning working with clients who are perceived to be different from themselves can be changed. Given the similarities between black and white students' self report on the problem areas, it appears that, in the absence of data clearly indicating otherwise, all counselors should initially assume that some variation of the counseling methods typically used with white students would be efficacious with black students.

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Footnotes

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Table 1

Cell Sizes After Random Deletions

		Group[1]		
		1	2	3	
Class[2]	1	32	28	40	100
	2	16	14	20	50
		48	42	60	150

1 (1) Black Students in Black University

(2) Black Students in White University

(3) White Students in White University

2 (1) Underclasspersons (Freshmen and Sophomores)

(2) Upperclasspersons (Juniors and Seniors)

Table 2

F Values For Two-Way ANOVAS Significant at p .05

Item	Class (1)	Group (2)	Group X Class
Legal Information	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Dormitory Policy	8.465	N.S.	N.S.
Roommate Conflict	5.420	N.S.	N.S.
Dormitory Resident Conflict	4.059	N.S.	N.S.
Study Efficiency	5.480	4.449	N.S.
Academic Difficulties	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Setting Career Goals	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Ethnic Unity	N.S.	5.181	N.S.
Ethnic Trust	N.S.	3.060	N.S.
Negotiating the University System	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Extracurricular Activities	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Campus Facilities	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Financial Assistance	6.221	6.836	4.220
Social Difficulties	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Personal Difficulties	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
Inter-Racial Conflicts	N.S.	3.153	N.S.
Intra-Racial Conflicts	N.S.	3.515	N.S.
Sex Information	6.420	N.S.	N.S.
Sex Education	6.024	N.S.	N.S.

(1) F1, 144, P .05 = 3.84

F1, 144, p .01 = 6.64

(2) F2, 144, p .05 = 2.99

F2, 144, p .01 = 4.60

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Each Group*

	Group 1(1)		Group 2(2)		Group 3(3)		Upper(4)		Upper(5)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Legal Information	1.90	.85	1.93	.95	1.73	1.01	1.94	1.00	1.70	.79
Dormitory Policy	1.67	.90	1.67	.88	1.46	.80	1.74	.92	1.32	.65
Roommate Conflict	1.40	.80	1.30	.70	1.33	.78	1.44	.85	1.14	.45
Dormitory Resident Conflict	1.55	.97	1.47	.81	1.29	.74	1.53	.94	1.24	.55
Study Efficiency	2.90	1.16	2.33	1.02	2.81	1.04	2.79	1.11	2.36	1.01
Academic Difficulties	2.26	1.01	2.35	.94	2.38	1.06	2.35	1.07	2.30	.84
Setting Career Goals	2.19	1.21	2.48	1.19	2.50	1.24	2.38	1.21	2.46	1.22
Ethnic Unity	2.02	1.12	1.68	.95	2.31	1.01	2.05	1.09	1.84	.95
Ethnic Trust	2.02	1.22	1.82	1.02	2.33	1.00	2.09	1.10	1.94	1.06
Negotiating the University System	2.79	1.26	2.50	1.19	2.65	1.00	2.55	1.20	2.78	1.04
Extracurricular Activities	2.40	1.17	2.28	1.11	2.56	1.13	2.42	1.17	2.38	1.07
Campus Facilities	2.88	1.35	2.50	1.00	2.79	1.13	2.78	1.19	2.54	1.05
Financial Assistance	3.05	1.43	2.20	1.13	2.92	1.44	2.85	1.37	2.30	1.31

	Group 1(1)		Group 2(2)		Group 3(3)		Upper(4)		Upper(5)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Social Difficulties	2.17	1.23	2.15	1.04	2.21	.84	2.23	1.04	2.06	1.00
Personal Difficulties	2.62	1.25	2.30	1.06	2.52	.97	2.45	1.15	2.48	.97
Inter-Racial Conflict	1.71	.92	1.33	.71	1.40	.76	1.53	.81	1.32	.77
Intra-Racial Conflict	1.60	.94	1.25	.54	1.58	.85	1.52	.84	1.32	.65
Sex Information	1.71	.89	1.55	.79	1.56	.82	1.72	.89	1.36	.63
Sex Education	1.86	.98	1.70	.98	1.79	.97	1.91	1.05	1.50	.73

1 - Never 5 - Very Often

(1) - Black Students in White University

(2) - White Students in White University

(3) - Black Students in Black University

(4) - Underclasspersons

(5) - Upperclasspersons

S.D. = Standard Deviation